

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2020 AT 10:00 HOURS

Present:

Members:

David Harrison (Chairman)
Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chairman)
Gordon Bailey
Sue Bennison
George Meyrick
Ann Sevier

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Rosalind Alderman	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Stone	Chief Finance Officer
Nigel Matthews	Head of Recreation Management and Learning
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
Jim Mitchell	Interpretation and Outreach Manager
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

135. Apologies for absence

135.1 Apologies for absence were received from John Sanger, David Bence and Neville Penman.

136. Declarations of Interest

136.1 There were no declarations of interest.

137. Chairman's announcements

137.1 The Chairman welcomed Victoria Mander who was recently appointed as the Authority's new Secretary of State member.

138. Minutes

138.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

138.2 Members asked Nigel Stone if the results of the staff survey would be covered at the meeting as mentioned in minute 128.7. He advised members that reference would be made to the survey under the Covid 19 and Health and Safety update (item 6 of the agenda) and that a full report would be brought to the next RAPC on the 2 November 2020.

139. Public Question Time

139.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

140. Covid 19 and Health and Safety Update - Oral Report

- 140.1 Nigel Stone provided an update on the latest situation regarding Covid 19 and the health and safety precautions the Authority had taken for protecting its staff.
- 140.2 He reported that planning application numbers remained consistent and applications received for the first quarter were the same as this time last year. This meant that a full planning service continued during Covid. Rangers had also been at full capacity since returning to the Forest in the May working Bank Holidays and weekends.
- 140.3 Nigel Stone informed members that a staff survey had been sent to all staff in early May and basic questions were asked about home working and IT performance. The results that came back had been positive. In the next survey that was due to go out in September, he said more specific questions would be asked as there were concerns now we were approaching the winter months and the need to keep up staff morale. The findings of this survey would be brought to the next Resources, Audit and Performance committee on 2 November.
- 140.4 Members were advised that a Wellbeing Group had been set up for staff as well as weekly coffee chats, and virtual Discovery Days had been arranged which would take place later in the month. Mental health awareness training sessions via an online format would take place in October. These were for all staff excluding Mental Health First Aiders and line managers who had already had separate training before lockdown restrictions.
- 140.5 Nigel Stone explained that Health and Safety forums would now be held every couple of months instead of twice a year as guidance and risk assessments would have to continually be kept up to date. The risks and guidance were intended to be a framework for how the Authority could safely increase office usage in a phased approach. Staff have been invited to give their comments, suggestions, concerns, and questions on the drafts before they go through the more formal phases of the next Health and Safety Forum which is to take place on the 17 September.
- 140.6 On a positive note Nigel Stone announced that the CO2 emissions impact had reduced by a third in the past five years due to changes in the way the Authority worked. There had been a 60% reduction in the Authority's CO2 emission impacts since the height of lockdown because staff were not commuting to and from work or travelling to meetings. A 'Maintain the Gain' approach is being set up aiming to keep the CO2 emissions low when staff returned to the office. He said that if staff did not commute to the office for two to three days a week then 35% to 45% could be saved.
- 140.7 Members asked if the New Forest National Park Authority felt obligated to return to the offices as Civil Servants had been requested to do so by the Government. Nigel Stone said that as National Parks were part of local government the advice did not directly apply. He said that the Authority would take an approach that was right for

the National Park and felt that a phased return is the most prudent option. It was noted that to maintain social distancing requirements, about 20 staff could be accommodated in the office at any one time, restricting a full return.

141. First Quarter Progress Report 2020-21

- 141.1 Referring to the second action on page 11 of the Work Programme regarding better understanding and engagement with existing and potential audiences, members agreed that officers look into the possibility of members being updated in this area of work through a members' day briefing.

Action, that a members' day be arranged on understanding and engagement with existing and potential audiences.

- 141.2 On behalf of the Committee the Chairman expressed his thanks to officers for their hard work in taking forward the actions in the Work Programme in these difficult times and asked that this be passed on to the relevant staff.

Resolved, that the contents of the report be noted.

Voting: None-voting against

142. April-July Budgetary Control Report 2020/21

- 142.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report, which provided a summary of the financial performance for the first four months of the financial year. The key figures were expenditure that showed £1.66m spend (37% of budget) and the income position which showed £2.21m received (50% of budget). Without the partnership projects, income was £2.01m from a budget of £3.87m (52%).
- 142.2 He said the Authority had been more fortunate than other businesses as the financial impact from Covid 19 had been minimal. Mr Stone advised that there had not been a reduction in the DEFRA grant for 2020/21, but the future grant would be dependent on the autumn Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 142.3 Nigel Stone informed members that the planning fee income was slightly down but was due to rise in due course as there were some larger applications /fees expected. He said there had been a delay in England Coast Path route determination, and although the New Forest Tour season had been shorter there was an increase in visitor numbers, but there might be potential for a subsidy requirement.
- 142.4 He advised members that the impact from Covid 19 on the pension scheme would not be known until the next valuation in May 2021 but would likely be significant and may have to pay a top up payment over several years.

Resolved, that the current income and expenditure position, including the potential savings and pressure identified

Voting: None-voting against

143. Nature Recovery in the New Forest National Park

- 143.1 Paul Walton introduced this report which informed members of the work that had been ongoing around nature recovery in the current financial year, and to seek approval to submit a bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund which supported projects that could help deliver some of the national parks nature recovery objective's.
- 143.2 He reminded members that it was the National Park's aim to become net zero with nature, and the Glover Review indicated that national parks should take the lead in terms of nature recovery. Mr Walton said National Parks England had worked together to publish the delivery plan for wildlife and national parks. It was the Authority's task to ensure that it would deliver its local elements of that national programme.
- 143.3 The Wildlife Round Table had brought together a number of NGO's and in particular the Wildlife Trust, RSPB and National Trust to agree a common approach for nature recovery in and around the surrounding areas of the National Park. The group had come together to develop a schedule for priority habitats and over 10,000 hectares of priority habitats had been identified.
- 143.4 Paul Walton informed members that the Green Recovery Challenge Fund was a national lottery heritage fund. He said he had recently received further details of how the Green Recovery Challenge Fund would be administered. Mr Walton advised members that the fund was due to open on the 14 September and was a £40 million fund for projects in England. Those projects needed to be ready to deliver on one of three aims namely, Nature Restoration, Nature Based Solutions and Connecting People with Nature. He said it was in keeping with the work that had been done over the past twelve months.
- 143.5 Mr Walton said the Authority was eligible to lead a partnership and receive grant funding, but there was a proviso in that a substantial proportion of that funding must be used by environmental charities. He informed members that the Authority was in a good position to potentially submit a bid to the Green Recovery Fund as a result of a lot of work that had been done with The Wildlife Round Table in identifying where opportunities for nature recovery might be placed, but also through partners in the Our Past, Our Future programme.
- 143.6 Paul Walton announced that there were two application opportunities. One was for funding of between £50,000-£250,000 and the Authority had fifteen working days to submit an expression of interest. If the Authority sought a higher level of funding for over £250,000 then the Authority had to put forward an expression of interest by the 24 September.

Resolved, that Members approve the principle of the NFNPA submitting a bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to further the Authority's work on nature recovery and to authorise officers to take all actions as necessary to progress this bid acting in consultation with Patrick Heneghan as Chairman of the Authority and the Chairman of the Committee.

Voting: None-voting against one abstention

144. Corporate Risk Register and Countermeasures

- 144.1 Referring to risk 9 (inadequate health and safety measures in place to support Pedall activities), members queried the level of this risk when compared to risk 11 (Accident or incident involving staff, volunteers, visitors, members or the public resulting in serious injury or death) and agreed that the level of risk under item 11 should be reviewed with the inclusion of reference to the mental health and wellbeing of staff. Following discussion, the Committee confirmed that there was a need to include Pedall as a specific risk in the register.
- 144.2 Members agreed that officers arrange a members' day on Pedall. The Committee also thought it would be useful to look at the period of lockdown generally and consider any lessons which could be learned from the challenges over this period.

Action, that a members' day be arranged on Pedall and that officers arrange a briefing for members on any lessons which could be learned from the lockdown period.

Resolved, that Members note the updated Corporate Risk Register

Voting: Non-voting against

145. White Paper: Planning for the Future

- 145.1 Steve Avery informed members that in August the Government had launched its Planning White Paper and 'Planning for the Future' consultation and wanted members to have sufficient opportunity to help collate a response. He invited Resources, Audit and Performance Committee members to join the members of the Planning Committee to attend a workshop which was to be held on the 16 September to go through the White Paper in detail.
- 145.2 He advised that he would be chairing a Heads of Planning meeting with colleagues from the other national parks in England to see how they might collectively respond. In addition, Mr Avery said that it was important that the Authority gave its own individual response to those aspects that might specifically affect the New Forest. It was also important to engage with the Authority's key partners and other stakeholders such as Hampshire CPRE, Friends of the Forest, and local parish councils to obtain their views.
- 145.3 At the Authority meeting on the 15 October 2020, Mr Avery said he would ask members to 'sign off' both on the collective National Parks England response and on its own individual response. He advised members that the consultation closed on the 29 October 2020.

Resolved, that the Committee note and agree the proposed means of engaging Members and other relevant parties in preparing the Authority's individual response to the White Paper: Planning for the Future and contributing to the wider NPE response in respect of the same.

Voting: None-voting against

146. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent

146.1 The Chairman reminded members that a Part 2 item would follow the meeting.

Resolved, that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business, as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during this item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and further that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Voting: Non-voting against

147. Date of next meeting

147.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 2 November 2020.

The meeting closed at 12:00 hours

Signed**Date**.....
(Chairman)